

## THE IDEAL EYEGGLASS

By W. PETT RIDGE

The new customer was so very dark of complexion that his shining silk hat seemed crab by comparison. He glanced across the counter at Mr. Hibbert in the manner of a dentist's showcase.

"You want a fresh rim fixed," said Mr. Hibbert. "Not one of our make, is it?"

He took a large book from the desk near, and as the customer brought some letters from his inside breast pocket in order to write the information, he took from him an envelope bearing a foreign stamp:

.....  
: Prince Colonna, :  
: 151 Torrington Sq., :  
: London, Eng., W. C. :  
.....

It appeared that the customer had intended to give another address, for he exhibited signs of fury at Mr. Hibbert's action, snatched the envelope back, and, giving a fierce tap to his silk hat, strode out of the shop into Great Portland street.

Mr. Hibbert called out that the eyeglass would be ready on the following Friday, and the customer retorted with a foreign ejaculation which sounded like the language of a bull. It is with some young men a pose to declare themselves adamant so far as the other sex is concerned.

Of these was Mr. Hibbert, and when the optician's closed that evening he went straight to evening classes at the Polytechnic in Regent street, and, the two hours of work over, walked by the most direct route home, looking at no one on the way to his rooms in Mornington crescent.

There the Misses Cann respected him because of his attitude of courteous reserve, and a lady boarder, who was a shorthand writer down west, and had the third floor back, secretly worshipped him because he never chaffed her.

The admirable Mr. Hibbert and the shorthand girl met at the door of the house in Mornington crescent, and the shorthand girl thought with something of regret that either of the two male boarders would have engaged her in sprightly conversation.

"Still busy?" she remarked, pleas-



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antly. "Are you never going to stop learning?"

"The more one studies," said the optician's assistant solemnly, "the more one finds out how little one knows."

"I should have thought," went on the shorthand girl, "that there were other ways a young gentleman could spend his evenings now the summer is coming on. Do you," she coughed slightly, "do you never take anybody out for a walk?"

"Why should I?"

"Well, lots of young gentlemen do.

And if you don't care for walking, there's a Wood Green train that takes you goodness knows how far for three-pence."

"While there are so many masterpieces of English literature to read," said young Hibbert, "it seems a waste of time to go riding on a train all alone."

"You needn't go all alone," said the shorthand girl.

"Don't see any great catch in taking anybody with me."

"Indeed!" said the young woman. She gave a short, sharp laugh. "Don't let me keep you from your masterpieces," she said caustically.

"I won't," replied Mr. Hibbert. "Good-night."

The uncommon eyeglass was late in being returned from the workshop because the man who had been entrusted with it had suddenly disappeared, eloping with a widow and five children.

The eyeglass was at this workman's lodgings in Marylebone, and the lad sent for it failing to return to the shop in Great Portland street, search for him was made, and he was found stalking a piano organ all over Paddington and demanding of the Italian lady in charge (old enough to be his aunt and sufficiently plain of feature to frighten birds), her hand in marriage.

Thus it was that Friday had come ere the eyeglass was ready, and Mr. Hibbert, waiting on myopic customers and testing their powers of reading at sight, looked nervously at the swing doors each time they opened, fearful that the colored gentleman might arrive in a furious temper.

But the strange customer did not call, and the eyeglass with its black rim, rescued from the possession of the amative messenger, was placed in the glass-covered counter ready for the call of its owner.

A week went by, and still this gentleman did not appear. Mr. Hibbert, noting the fact, determined one evening to take it round to the address in Torrington square on his way home.

In going across Gower street he met one of the firm's customers, a middle-aged gentleman who had achieved something like notoriety by wearing an eyeglass and a silk hat with a flat brim. Mr. Hibbert recognized the air of distinction that the customer gained from the monocle, and, without thinking, took the glass from his waistcoat pocket and fixed it, with aid from a shop window, in his right eye.

It fitted so well that he was wearing it when he turned into the square. It was still in his eye when he knocked at the door.

"Prince Colonna?"

"Gone," said the servant, "thanks be!"

"Do you happen to know," asked Mr. Hibbert, looking at her with admiration, "his present address?"

"No," said the girl sharply. "Nor want!" She was a round-faced girl, with small eyes; not prepossessing, but young Mr. Hibbert, as he looked at her through the eyeglass, thought she was the personification of angelic beauty. "Any more information?"

"Yes," gasped Mr. Hibbert; "I want to ask—to ask if your heart is free?"

"Not half so free as your manners," replied the servant. "Let go my hand this minute. I should look pretty if any of the others saw me."

"You would look pretty," he declared fervently, "under any circumstances. I never saw anyone so beautiful."

"I don't care for vulgar chaff, thank you."

"But really—you don't understand me." He spoke with great earnestness. "I wish I knew your Christian name."

"If you must know," said the girl, looking apprehensively over her shoulder at the staircase, "it's Dorothy. But they call me Sarah 'ere."

"You must and shall be mine," he cried rapturously. "Life is but an empty thing without you. When, where, how can I see you again?"

"Next Sunday's my day out."

"Till then, fairest and sweetest of your sex, till then—"

"Oh, you must be off, really," interrupted the girl. "There's somebody coming down from the drawing room. You're as bad as the Indian gentleman you was asking for, he was always proposing to every—Good night, sir!"

She closed the door hurriedly, and he found himself out on the whitened steps dazed with the concentrated excitement of the last few minutes.

It was growing dusk, and as he went along Cardington street, he kept his eyes on the ground, trying to realize that for the first time in his life, he, Charles W. Hibbert, was in love. The amazing good luck that had en-



"I want to be quite straightforward with you."

abled him to meet this adorable creature made him sure that he was the most fortunate man in the world.

"That you, Mr. Hibbert?" asked the elder Miss Cann from the first landing.

"Yes," he replied in a new voice. "And, Oh, Miss Cann, I am so happy. This is the first day of my life. Hitherto I have merely existed; to-day I begin to live."

"Fancy that!" said the elder Miss Cann. "He's had a glass, I expect, she whispered to her sister. "Not being used to it, it's taken effect."

"Miss Cann!" cried young Hibbert up the stairs ecstatically, "let me tell you all about it. My heart is so full of delight—"

"Stay where you are, sir," counseled the elder Miss Cann in a motherly way. "I'll come down and I'll open a small soda. That'll do you more good than anything."

The younger Miss Cann (who would be the last person in the world to tell an untruth, or even to exaggerate) has assured all of her lady friends, in the strictest confidence, that when half an hour later she went down stairs for a reel of thread she found the poor gentleman on one knee, begging her sister to fly with him to some distant island, and talking, generally, "like a book!"

The younger Miss Cann, with great presence of mind, lighted the gas and asked the infatuated Mr. Hibbert what was the matter with his eye? Whereupon the youth went to the mirror bordered with green tissue paper to investigate, and took out the eyeglass.

Then he glanced at the two middle aged ladies, laughed in a nervous way, said "Good night!" and, going out into the hall, took his candlestick and went upstairs.

He was quiet and reserved of manner at the morning meal, but then he was usually quiet and reserved; he evidently remembered the incident of the previous evening, for he avoided meeting the eye of the elder Miss Cann, and dared to speak only to her sister at the other end, and to the shorthand girl opposite.

"Are you always going to wear one now, Mr. Hibbert?" asked the younger Miss Cann. "Let me fill up your cup again. I always think it is the making of a gentleman."

"Wear what?" he inquired.

"Why, surely you remember that you were wearing an eyeglass when you came home yesterday evening."

"Wonder where I put it?" said Mr. Hibbert, puzzled. He felt in his waistcoat pocket without success.

"Where did you place it last?"

"I suppose I must have left it upon the dressing table. Excuse me, will you, while I run up and see? It belongs to one of our customers."

The ladies glanced at each other when the young man had left the room, but they spoke no word until he returned.

"Yes," sighed Mr. Hibbert, answering the inquiry desolately. "I've got it!"

"Let Miss Mansell see you with it on. She can decide whether it really suits you or not. It's all a matter of taste, of course, but I think—"

"Do you mind," said Mr. Hibbert excitedly to the shorthand girl as she looked across to judge the effect, "do you mind if I walk down with you this morning?"

"I was going to tram," she said, "but—"

"Do me the favor," he begged.

She consented, but made a provision that he should wear the eyeglass (which she thought admirably suited to him) and that, wearing it, he should see her to the door of her office.

"I want to be quite straightforward with you," he said, looking into her eyes as they went south. "You are the dearest and sweetest girl that ever was since the world began."

She shook her head doubtfully, but refrained from speaking a word of interruption.

The two almost danced to the terminus of the tram lines, and quiet, dismal folk hastening to work turned to look at them with curiosity and envy.

Mr. Hibbert saw her to the door of her office, and, despite the fact that her colleagues were looking through the wire blind, claimed, in broad day, the right of an engaged man, and kissed her lips. The shorthand girl went inside, a proud and happy girl.

"Hi!" cried Mr. Hibbert, starting suddenly to run along the pavement at a rate that frightened the passers by. "Stop him! I want him!"

"Which one?" demanded some loafer, excited into a desire for labor by Mr. Hibbert's energy. "The white man or the—"

A constable infected by the stir, joined in the running, and the colored gentleman, looking over his shoulder and recognizing that he was being pursued, took to his heels.

They caught him just by Peter Robinson's, and held him, despite his struggles, until Mr. Hibbert arrived, panting.

"Has he got anything of yours?" asked the constable.

"No," replied Mr. Hibbert, breathlessly. "I—I've got something of his."

"Well, but," urged the constable, "you can't give him in charge for that." The crowd indorsed this legal view of the situation.

"Here's your eyeglass, sir," said Mr. Hibbert. "One and six to pay."

The colored gentleman found himself released, and, turning to the crowd, expressed a heated opinion of them and their country.

Then, declaring that the eyeglass had made for him nothing but trouble, he took it and threw it down violently on the curb. The glass smashed into small pieces.

Nothing to add, except that Mr. and Mrs. Hibbert are quite happy at Highgate, and when (as is the case in every household) there comes domestic jars, Mr. Hibbert remembers how she last appeared to him through the magic eyeglass, and whatever the subject of dispute may be, promptly admits that the fault is his.—The King.

When a man boasts that he has never made a fool of himself just pray for him; he couldn't. The job was taken out of his hands when "he war bo'n dat way."—Kate Thyson Marr.